

# "Our Messages to Our Hakham" A Tribute to Rabbi Selim Dweck zt"l

By David Betesh

On October 21, 2004, many of us woke up to hear of the news of the passing of our beloved teacher, Rabbi Selim Dweck zt"l. The rabbi, who was only 33, was a Judaic Studies teacher at the Yeshivah of Flatbush High School since the fall of 1998. He left a lasting impression on the hundreds of students that he taught. With the Rabbi's passing, all of his former students came together to attend many different memorials, *arayats* (services), and classes.

During the week of mourning, Lauren Betesh and Paulette Grazi had the insight to assemble a photo album and a message book to Rabbi Dweck and his family. Over fifty students helped contribute to the book. The following are selected excerpts:

"I'll always remember the way Hacham Shlomo would greet me everyday. With a smile he would say, "Hello, Miss Abadie." Rabbi Dweck was a teacher who applied whatever we were learning to our daily lives. He made everything so applicable to each and every student. I've learned so much from Rabbi Dweck, not only in the classroom, but by the way he led his life..."

- Talia Abadie, HS '04

"I remember the day after Leo Chalom passed away, Rabbi Dweck was supposed to give us a big test. He cancelled the test because he realized how upset we all were. He understood the importance of things in life, and



how certain things just weren't as important as others. We spent the whole day discussing Leo's passing and we concluded by saying that everything happens for a reason and we just have to accept that everything is in Hashem's hands..."

- Roxanne Anteby, HS '04

"I remember the day we figured out that we were related to each other. Although we were just distant cousins, you treated me as if I was part of your own family..."

- Lee Douek, HS '03

"...Being the 'new girl' wasn't easy, especially since I could never manage to remember which staircase took you all the way to the gym or your hidden classroom 208. I was petrified when you told me to stand by the wall that first day of class when I walked in a few seconds after the bell had rung. Only after your

laughter did I calm down and finally smile. That was the first of many incidents where you would know how to have a good time with your students and share moments upon which we would look back and laugh together."

- Yvonne Harari, HS '04

"I remember that one day I came to class with a new haircut. He noticed and said: 'Miss Harary, I like your haircut.' That comment made my day. It's the small things that make people special too."

- Joyce Harary, HS '04

"The first thing that comes to mind when I think of Rabbi Dweck is his daily cup of water by his side. He knew each and everyone of us pretty well, especially since we had him eleven times a week in junior year! Whenever one of us would get cold, he would always give his sweater to us. We never asked him, he would just offer. That's the kind of special person he was..."

- Gloria Ash, HS '04

"...I finally excelled on his Talmud test! He sat with me on his free time and answered every question that I had before the test. He also taught me that everything is possible and you can do well at anything if you just put a lot of effort and preparation into something..."

- Bella Ballas, HS '04

"... I had broken my leg in the

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beginning of sophomore year, and one day, as there was a fire drill, I needed to get down the stairs. The Rabbi made it his personal mission to get me down those stairs. He cleared out a section of the stairwell by yelling and pushing his way through, and then proceeded to hold my cane and guide me down the staircase. It was quite a site to see..."

- Michelle Biller, HS '04

"I remember when I first told Rabbi Dweck that I was entertaining the idea of going to Israel after high school to learn for the year. I saw the smile light up his face. I will never forget that smile. He assured me that it was going to be an awesome experience and he even invited me for Shabbatot... He was a confidant, someone all of us felt we could talk to and he understood us."

-Shelley Setton, HS '05

"No other teacher would have listened to our complaints as Rabbi Dweck did. A teacher had just assigned us that log paper for economics. The students made fun of our papers in class, and the "lives" we were assigned. Rabbi Dweck laughed with us, yet told us that we might learn something from this. Even if we didn't understand the importance of the assignment at that time, he stressed to us that everything we learned would come into play and that it isn't a waste of time."

- Nina Tawil, HS '04

"Last year, the day I cut my bangs, Rabbi Dweck took one look at me and said "Miss Azar, going for a new look?" The day I did poorly on a test, he asked if I stayed up late the night before.

When I wore my glasses, the rabbi asked if my eyes were ok. Rabbi Dweck truly cared. He cared not only about the students that did well, but also about everyone. Any time one of us had a problem, school related or not, his classroom door was wide open, with a mini box of cereal on the desk, and a sweater hanging over the edge. Everyone knew that he would listen and advise. Rabbi Dweck was a true and compassionate mentor to me in all the years that I knew him—from the night I attended his wedding to Dr. Dweck, to his last day at Flatbush."

-Sylvia Azar, HS '05

"...On seminar we asked: 'Rabbi, how could you think of making aliyah? Your job is here, your family is here, and your whole life is here!' Hakham would simply reply, '*Libi Bemizrach veanochi besof maarav* (My heart is in the east, Israel, and I am all the way in the west)'. We'll adjust to the situation. It's been my dream since I was young, and when Dr. Dweck and I are ready, we're going to move and raise our children in Israel.' Sure enough, on August 4, his dream became a reality..."

- Sarah Grazi, HS '04

"A man that cared so much for his students, I have never met...a man that truly loved teaching, I have never met...a man that had an absolute love for his origins, I have never met...a man that loved Torah so dearly, I have never met...That is until I met Hakham Shlomo...may he rest in peace..."

- Marc Mouhadeb, HS '02

"[The rabbi] was always someone you felt comfortable going to with a question. One time late in the day, a student hadn't prayed yet and asked Rabbi Dweck what he should be doing. I listened to him tell the student to pray Mincha once with tefillin and then pray mincha again without. Thanks to the Rabbi, whenever I wake up late, I do exactly as he taught me, and I will always think about him for the rest of my life when I pray..."

-Ezra Dweck, HS '04

"When the Rabbi would see my friends and I on the teacher's table during lunch, he would always comment with a smile, and surprisingly enough, he didn't kick us off the table. He would always joke around about that and he never hesitated to join us students on his table."

- Dror Galamidi, HS '04

"...Not only did I get to know him in school, but outside of school as well. He got me to come to his minyan every Shabbat in the annex of Shaare Zion, before that, I wasn't exactly a "regular". Rabbi Dweck helped me be a better person without my understanding. Now as I look back, the Rabbi helped me in all aspects of my life, and I am regretful that I never thanked him in person..."

- Nathan Betesh, HS '04

"I will always remember being the Rabbi's right-hand man in our Talmud class, aiding him in teaching the rest of the class. He gave me much courage and support. He gave me confidence and taught me the great qualities of being a leader and teacher. I still

## IN MEMORIAM

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use these qualities today, and plan of utilizing them for the rest of my life..."

- Isaac Bunick, HS '02

"During the Yerushalmi exam, I stood up and then Rabbi Dweck, the proctor, asked me what I was doing. I replied, "Rabbi this test is too long, I'm taking a break." I then invited him to sit down next to me. Our conversation turned out to be short however those three minutes was the best break I could've taken. He got my mind off the test and we were just talking about life. I recall telling him how tedious the test was. He replied, "at least you have something to do and get credit for, while I have to walk around for six hours not utilizing my time." Rabbi Dweck taught me that every minute counts."

-Joseph Harary, HS '04

"I remember Junior Picnic vividly. We were picking the Rabbi on our football team. He was amazing! His athletic skills were just as good as his teaching skills. Honestly, it was one of the best games I've ever played. He showed me that being a teacher wasn't just confined in the classroom. He was the epitome of the all-around-guy. His unique huge smile from ear to ear stands so clearly in my mind..."

-Mourad Shehebar, HS '03

"On Freshie seminar before I was about to be hazzan in front of my grade, he would wake up early and coach me for an hour before the prayers and listen to all my tunes to make sure that I would do a great job. Later on after I graduated, he advised me on how I should go about producing the Gabriel Shrem's pizmonim tapes onto CDs. Unfortunately,

he passed away a week or so before the finished product of CDs were able to get to him... A special thanks to Mr. David Hidary and family who sponsored all the High Holiday CDs in memory of Rabbi Dweck..."

- David Betesh, HS '02

"Dr. Dweck, I still remember the day Rabbi Dweck sat down on a desk and told us how he met you and how he proposed. When he was a young boy he would stay home on Fridays and help his mom in the kitchen where he ultimately learned how to bake cookies. Therefore when it came time to propose he baked you all those cookies asking you to marry him."

-Marc Smouha, HS '03

"Rabbi Dweck was my teacher for two years and I remember everyone always trying to find him a wife. We always saw him and Dr. Catton speaking in the hallways and suspected that maybe they were dating. We later found out that they were getting engaged! We had dedicated a whole rikudim for him. I'll never forget how happy he was while we were all dancing around him in honor of him getting engaged. That was one of my most memorable moments in Flatbush - seeing the joy on the Rabbi's face..."

-Seymour Klein, HS '02

"Teaching was the world to him. He made sure to never miss a day if he didn't really have to be in school. One Friday, which was the day after Dr. Dweck gave birth, Rabbi Dweck was in school and ready to teach! I couldn't believe it! "Rabbi what are you doing in school? You just had a new baby girl!" All he said was "I'm here to teach so let's start!"

-Jaclyne Schweky, HS '05

"...Most of us admitted that we saw him more than we saw our fathers, and some of us resorted to calling him "Daddy". The Rabbi and the 402 girls formed a special bond throughout junior year by our frequent class discussions... Upon graduating, Rabbi Dweck gave his famous "goodbye" speech before making aliyah... Of course he received a standing ovation... Instead of thinking heartbreaking thoughts when he comes to mind, we should be thankful that we were lucky enough to spend so much time with the brilliant Hakham Shlomo Dweck."

- Sylvia Betesh, HS '04

You can clearly see from all of the above excerpts that Rabbi Dweck made a unique impression on each of his students in a different way. From the small acts of giving up his sweater to a cold student, to allowing a student to sit in the teacher's lounge, from giving an extra 2 points on each test for writing the rabbi's correct name, to genuinely greeting one with a simple "good morning" in the corridor, the rabbi's door was always wide open for all of his students. His affable character and his staunch commitment to everything he believed in is his legacy and will live on. A very special thanks goes to my sister, Lauren Betesh, for starting the scrapbook and allowing people to put their thoughts on paper. Condolences to Dr. Rochelle Dweck and family, to the Dweck family, and to all of the rabbi's former students at the Yeshivah of Flatbush on this immense loss. □

*David Betesh was a former student of Rabbi Selim Dweck zt"l at the Yeshivah of Flatbush.*